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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [QA](#)
SUBJECT: QATAR COULD SEVER TIES WITH ISRAEL IF PART OF
JOINT ARAB STANCE

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Classified By: Ambassador Joseph E. LeBaron, for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

(C) KEY POINTS

-- Qatar's Prime Minister told Al Jazeera television January 11 that Qatar would consider severing its relations with Israel "provided there is a collective Arab decision to cut ties with Israel."

-- Qatar formally requested January 11 that the Arab League hold an emergency ministerial meeting to establish a "unified Arab position on Israel's aggression in Gaza."

-- Israeli Trade Representative to Qatar Roi Rosenblit told the Ambassador January 12 that Israeli FM Livni and Shaykh Hamad last spoke by phone January 8. In all the direct contact between the GOQ and GOI since the Gaza fighting began, the GOQ never indicated any intention to change its diplomatic relationship with Israel, he said.

-- Rosenblit expressed surprise that Al Jazeera and Qatar were leading the region, not following it, in disseminating excessive language about Gaza.

-- Qatar has hosted the quasi-diplomatic Israeli trade office since 1996.

(C) COMMENT

-- We think it is unlikely that Qatar will actually sever its overt ties with Israel, for two reasons:

a) The relationship is too useful to Qatar; it helps Qatar stay in the regional game diplomatically.

b) The condition the Prime Minister set -- "a collective Arab decision to cut relations with Israel -- is unlikely to occur.

End Key Points and Comment.

11. (SBU) Prime Minister Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani, acknowledging the pressure Qatar faces to close Israel's trade office in Doha, said in a press interview on Al Jazeera television's Arabic service January 11 that Qatar would consider severing its relations with Israel, if "there is a collective Arab decision to cut relations with Israel." Hinting at Arab hypocrisy (Note: Egypt, Jordan and Mauritania, unlike Qatar, maintain ambassadorial-level diplomatic relations with Israel.)

¶2. (SBU) The Prime Minister stressed that Qatar alone should not "make a sacrifice" while other Arab countries continue to deal with Israel. "Any decision to cut relations with Israel should have a clear credibility from all (Arab states)." The PM added that he was not saying that Arab countries having signed peace treaties with Israel (Note: Egypt and Jordan) should sever ties, only that Qatar was "prepared to join a collective Arab decision."

¶3. (C) Israeli Trade Representative to Qatar Roi Rosenblit told the Ambassador January 12 that Israeli Foreign Minister Livni and Prime Minister Hamad last spoke by phone January 8.

In all the bilateral contact since the fighting began, the GOQ has never indicated any intention to change its relationship with Israel, according to Rosenblit.

Acknowledging that he may be too optimistic, Rosenblit told the Ambassador he saw nothing in the Qatari PM's Al Jazeera interview to cause him concern, underscoring that the PM merely responded to a journalist's question.

¶4. (C) Rosenblit expressed surprise that Al Jazeera and Qatar were leading the region, not following it, in disseminating excessive language about Gaza. In the end, though, he emphasized that Oman closed Israel's trade office once in the past; Qatar never did. Then again, he added, Al Jazeera was not the potent media force during the Intifada that it is now.

¶5. (U) Against the backdrop of Qatar's call, also on January 11, for an emergency Arab League ministerial meeting to "seek ways to respond to the Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip," the PM underscored on Al Jazeera "a need for a unified Arab stance on the Israeli aggression in Gaza" and added that "Arab leaders should represent the opinions of their peoples if they want stability."

¶6. (SBU) The MFA confirmed January 12 that Qatar requested the Arab League ministerial. As of this writing, the official MFA statement and the transcript of Shaykh Hamad's

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above interview had not been posted to MFA's web site.

¶7. (SBU) The last time the GOQ considered breaking off ties with Israel was when it announced in November 2000 the closure of the Israeli trade office. Qatar was scheduled to host the summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) on November 12 of that year and take over the presidency of the OIC immediately after the summit. Against the backdrop of violence in the Palestinian territories at the time following then-Israeli PM Sharon's visit to Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, Iran and Saudi Arabia had threatened to boycott the gathering if Qatar did not close the Israeli trade office, which first opened in 1996.

¶8. (SBU) Qatar announced a one-time closure of the Israeli trade office on November 9, 2000 in order to keep the OIC Summit meeting in Doha on track. The trade office, however, never effectively closed. In fact, Israeli personnel remained in Qatar, keeping a low profile, until normal operations of the office resumed.

LeBaron